All fictional characters have the potential to experience tragedy. It is part of the human experience. In the play *Antigone* written by Sophocles, it is no different, then, for the protagonist, Antigone. In Greek literature, a tragic hero is based upon an individual having several of the following qualities: having a high social position; not being overly good or bad; having a single flaw that brings about his/her own death and potentially the death of many others; and finally, obtaining a catharsis, or feeling of sympathy and pity from the audience.

Definition

Hook

Antigone was a prime example of a Greek tragic hero. She, being the daughter of Oedipus, (previous) King of Thebes, had a high social position in the city of Thebes. She was also a well-rounded character. On the one hand, Antigone’s good side forces her to bury her dead brother’s, Polyneices’s, body, according to her religious beliefs. However, in addition to her good side, Antigone stubbornly refuses to follow the law of the city which forbids Polyneices’s burial. This stubborn pride was Antigone’s tragic flaw which led to her downfall and death. Because of her ill-timed suicide, she evoked sympathy and pity from the audience allowing for the catharsis which must accompany her final outcome.

Thesis w/

explanation

At the beginning of the events from the play, we are confronted with an already headstrong character. Antigone, a princess in her city of Thebes, understands that burial is supremely important within her culture—people must be buried to be able to enter the afterlife. She decides to bury her brother who is dead on the battlefield. She says, “But I will bury him: and if I must die,/I say that this crime is holy. I shall lie down/With him in death, and I shall be as dear/To him as he to me” (Prologue, 55-58). This makes her a well-rounded character capable of both good deeds and wrongdoings, good traits and flaws.

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How to Cite

However, her fatal flaw is demonstrated in several places in the play. Creon, the present King of Thebes, indicates this by stating, “This girl [Antigone] is guilty of a double insolence,/Breaking the given laws and boasting of it” (Scene 2, 80-81). Even the people of the city, the Choragos, see her as stubborn. They state, “Like father, like daughter: both headstrong, deaf to/reason!/She has never learned to yield” (Scene 2, 75-76).

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She is sentenced to death because of her stubborn attitude. She has broken the law of the city and must pay the consequences. Creon, however, did not see the arrogance in his own flawed law. The great prophet Teiresias, the Choragos, and even his own son, Haimon, saw the law as unjust. But Creon does not relent until it is too late. Creon’s own stubborn pride along with his unjust law, eventually, is what brings on Antigone’s death and those of many others, including his son’s and his wife’s.

Long quote citation

Antigone dies by her own hand, explained by the messenger in Exodos, lines 59—60: “She [Antigone] had made a noose of her fine linen veil/And hanged herself.” The messenger describes how Haimon dies, as well:

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And he [Creon] called to him [Haimon]: “What have you done, child? Speak to me./O my son, my son. I come to you on my knees!”/But Haimon spat in his face. He said not a word,/Staring—And suddenly drew his sword/And lunged. Creon shrank back, the blade missed; and the boy,/Desperate against himself, drove it half its length/Into his own side and fell. (Exodos, 65-72)

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And Eurydice, Creon’s wife and Queen of Thebes, kills herself after learning of her son’s death. The messenger brings us this news in Exodos, line 102.

Following all of the deadly action, the Choragos makes its final statement to the audience: “There is no happiness where there is no wisdom;/No wisdom but in submissions to the gods./Big words are always punished,/And proud men in old age learn to be wise” (Exodos, 139-142). This brings the play to a close, allowing the catharsis to begin for the audience which surely now has recognized the emotion and pity of the play’s outcome.

Conclusion & Wrap-up

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After careful study of the play *Antigone*, the tragic hero is clearly Antigone herself. She contained all of the qualities of a tragic hero. She was a character in high standing in her society, she was capable of both good and bad qualities, she had a single flaw that led to her downfall and death, and the audience was able to sympathize with her plight and pity her final outcome.